



# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

## House of Representatives

### Honoring Retired Col. Victor “Vic” Fernandez

Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor a friend, patriot, and man of great faith, Retired Col. Victor “Vic” Fernandez. A 30-year Army veteran, Vic served his country valiantly and led the effort to establish the Pikes Peak National Cemetery in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

A Colorado native, Vic grew up in Trinidad with a longstanding family tradition of military service. His great grandfather fought in the Civil War, his father in World War II, and his uncle was captured at the battle of Corregidor in World War II and later survived the Bataan Death March. Vic followed this tradition of service to his country and graduated from West Point in 1959 with a degree in mechanical engineering. Vic’s 30-year career included two Panama tours, two Germany tours, and multiple stateside postings in addition to his time in the Vietnam War.

Vic served two tours in Vietnam, and upon his return, was disheartened at the poor reception he and other soldiers received. Because of this experience, Vic dedicated his retirement to ensuring that soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan did not share the same experience. He and his wife Sherry, spent many late nights at airports and military bases, often waiting until 2 a.m., to greet returning troops with a warm handshake, a cheeseburger with fries, a welcoming smile, and prayer.

Additionally, Vic served as president of the Pikes Peak Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America. He was also a founding member of the Board of Home Front Cares and the Southeast Family Center and Armed Services YMCA.

In 1999, Vic became the chairman of the Pikes Peak Veterans Cemetery Committee. He advocated for a National Veterans Cemetery in the Pikes Peak region. Vic wanted a place that would serve the veterans of Southern Colorado for generations to follow. In 2006, he, and the other founding members of the cemetery board, Ralph McCutchen and Joe Henjum approached me with their vision. On my second day in office in January 2007, I introduced H.R. 295, which directed the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a national cemetery for veterans in the Pikes Peak region.

In May of 2008, I conducted a field hearing in Colorado Springs to address The National Cemetery Administration’s longstanding 75-mile rule. A typical spring day in Colorado, VA Under Secretary

for Memorial Affairs William F. Tuerk and other distinguished guests traveling to the hearing were greeted with sunny weather in Denver upon arrival. By the time they drove through Castle Rock, snowflakes were falling. The field hearing started over an hour late, because of poor road conditions, due to a white-out blizzard on Monument Hill. Vic and everyone involved in the hearing could only attribute the storm to divine intervention.

During the hearing, Vic offered passionate testimony and argued that ‘these geographic and weather pattern hindrances make the Veterans Administration internal 75-mile rule a useless tool in the state of Colorado. The combination of the geography, weather patterns and a foolish regulation serves only to assure that the Veterans and their families in the Pikes Peak Region and southern Colorado are not properly nor fairly served by Fort Logan.’

Because of providential weather conditions and the testimony of Vic, and others, Under Secretary Tuerk decided it was appropriate to break the VA’s longstanding, 75-mile rule and establish a national cemetery in Southern Colorado.

Years later, after legislation for the cemetery was signed into law, Vic told a reporter, ‘I think God is keeping me alive so I can be buried there.’ Vic had dedicated over 20 years passionately advocating for this national monument. In 2018, the Pikes Peak National Cemetery opened, with the capacity for 197,000 veterans to be interred. Because of his vision, the Pikes Peak National Cemetery will serve as a permanent monument and final resting place for generations of our nation’s heroes.

In addition to his deep-rooted patriotism, Vic was a man of dedicated spiritual conviction. A longtime parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi in Colorado Springs, he served as a Grand Knight in the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic men’s chapter that he helped to establish.

Vic was a giant amongst men and lived his life tenaciously in service to his Creator, his nation, his family, and his community. His lifetime of service has left a permanent impact on the Pikes Peak region.

Madam Speaker, I ask that my colleagues in Congress join me in honoring this man of great faith, passion, and patriotism, my friend, U.S. Army Retired Col. Victor “Vic” Fernandez.